



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

## THE ROMANCE AND THE TRAGEDY OF SNEEZING

By Dr. WILSON D. WALLIS

SAN FRANCISCO

FROM time immemorial the sneeze has been deemed worthy of notice and has elicited some form of salutation from bystanders or some expression from the agent. The phrase, "not to be sneezed at," has behind it an importance attaching to the act of sneezing to which the whole human race bears witness. Even children notice it as something peculiar and have sayings of their own, such as, "Scat!" or "Shoo!" The origin of the importance attaching to sneezing is thus a question of psychological import as well as one of cultural diffusion.

As W. R. Halliday has remarked,

It is *per se* a startling phenomenon to find the body, which in normal action is the instrument of the owner's will and intention, behaving in a way independent of his desire or volition. Simply because it is involuntary, the twitching of the eyelid or the tingling of the ear must be miraculous. And primitive man finds a significance in everything which attracts his notice, particularly in cases where there is no obvious cause.

This is good psychology and an array of facts can be adduced to prove the point. Before returning to the interpretation of the beliefs attached to sneezing, it will be well to describe some of the customs associated with it. The first instances will be cited from the classical cultures and from our own civilization, after which we will review the evidence from savagery.

*Ancient Greece.*—The ancient Greek greeted a sneeze with the words, *ζῆθι, Ζεῦ σῶθον*, "Live, Zeus preserve thee!" Aristotle declared the sneeze an honorable acknowledgment of the seat of good sense and genius. Accordingly, when a bridegroom sneezed an observer remarked, "Some good spirit sneezed out on thee a blessing"; and Penelope remarked, "My son has sneezed a blessing on all my words." Sneezing was the indication of life first shown by the man primeval endowed by Prometheus with living spirit. The custom has been handed down by the Greek Adam to his descendants.

*Rome.*—Petronius, Apuleius and Pliny tells us of the Roman custom of saluting one who has sneezed, and Plutarch declares that to sneeze before a naval battle betokens victory. The be-

lief was current among the Romans that when the Dogstar arose, the wild beast, which the Egyptians called Oryx, stood facing it steadfastly, and then sneezed, "as if it were worshiping it."<sup>1</sup> The Roman salutation was "Salve!" equivalent to our "May you have health!"

*Persia*.—In the Zoroastrian religion, according to the precepts of the Zend-Avesta, prayer is advised after sneezing. It is necessary to recite some of the sacred texts, for there is a fiend in the body. In the body is a fire, a disposition, or an instinct of sneezing; this wages war with the fiend; sneezing indicates the triumph of this disposition and the expulsion of the demon. One who hears the sneeze utters the same prayer as the sneezer.

*Hindu*.—The Hindu theory is that a spirit is entering or is leaving the nose. The bystander says "Live!" to which the reply must be made, "With you," that is, "The same to you," or the bystander says, "God bless you!" or, "God be praised!" —the last mentioned is borrowed from the Mohammedans. If one is beginning work and hears another sneeze, it is necessary to begin the task again. If one sneezes while praying he must begin again, otherwise his prayers will be offensive to the deity. Compare with this the English saying:

To sneeze at prayer  
Is the devil's snare.

*China*.—In China when one sneezes he remarks: "I wonder who is talking about me!" A bystander may say, "Dai gut lai see!" "Good luck!"

*Mohammedanism*.—Replying to a sneeze is one of the duties recognized by the Mohammedans as among the Tarz Kafa'i, the sacred duties imposed upon the faithful. According to Abu Hurairah, Mohammed said: Verily God loves sneezing and hates yawning. If a person sneezes and says immediately thereafter, "God be praised!" one of the auditors must reply, "God have mercy on you." To this the sneezer replies, "God guide us and guide you." The nose is a dangerous retreat for evil spirits and the Mohammedan, when he rises in the morning, washes out the nose with water, for the devil has probably visited it during the night.

*Jews*.—A Jewish tradition states that before the time of Jacob men sneezed but once and then died—a curious swan's song. In order to preserve a memory of the happy substitution when men died from natural diseases rather than from a sneeze,

<sup>1</sup> Pliny, Bk. II., 40; Ælian VII., 8.

every prince commanded his subjects to employ a salutatory exclamation after the act of sneezing. The custom of replying to a sneeze existed among the Jews, whose formula was, "Tobim khayim," *i. e.*, "God (give you) life," or "Asusa," "Health." The sneezer generally recited Genesis XLIX., 18, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord"; and, when the bystanders blessed him, replied: "Be thou blessed." That the Hebrews probably regarded the sneeze as an indication of the coming or the leaving of the spirit is shown by 2 Kings IV., 35: When Elisha restored the Shumanite's son his return to life was signified by the lad's sneezing seven times, and then opening his eyes.

*Christianity.*—In early Christian times the sign of the cross was made by the sneezer, though later ecclesiastical advice was to pay no heed to sneezings. They were sometimes regarded as a momentary palsy. In vain, however, did Eligius (588–659), Bishop of Noyon, an eminent French clerical writer, admonish the Christians to "pay no attention to auguries and sneezings." Respect for them persisted, and a later tradition within the church found countenance for it by assigning its origin to an ordinance of Pope Gregory, who is said to have instituted a short benediction for such occasions. He was moved to this by the fact that a certain pestilence was attended by sneezing and these sneezes usually resulted in death.

However this may be, we find many survivals among Christian peoples of the superstitious respect attaching to this remarkable function. The Roman salutation of *Sit salutiferum* is preserved by Italians of to-day as Felicita, by the French as Bonne santé, or a "God bless you," by Germans as "Prosit!" or as "Gesundheit!" A German who sneezes while putting on his shoes accepts this as a sign of ill-luck; if he sneezes while telling something to another this is a sign of the truth of his assertion. In Estonia if two pregnant women sneeze at the same time this is a sign that they will give birth to daughters; if their husbands sneeze in chorus this signifies that the children will be sons.

In the north of England, when one sneezes the formula is "Bless the bairn"; and children are still told:

If you sneeze on a Monday, you sneeze for danger;  
Sneeze on a Tuesday, kiss a stranger;  
Sneeze on a Wednesday, sneeze for a letter;  
Sneeze on a Thursday, something better;  
Sneeze on a Friday, sneeze for sorrow;  
Sneeze on a Saturday, see your sweetheart to-morrow.

What the Sunday sneeze betokens we can only guess.

We probably have European influence in the belief of the negroes of Jamaica that if the nostrils itch so that you sneeze, some one is backbiting you; and also in the belief of negroes or North Carolina to the effect that if you sneeze while eating, you will hear of a death.

In Malta one says to the sneezer, "Evviva" or "Sahha!"

In England a sneeze is often greeted with, "God bless the Duke of Argyl," though this formula is an insult to a Scotchman.

Another English saying, "We are never so near death as when we sneeze," seems to indicate the idea that a sneeze is a sign that the soul is leaving the body.

In Ireland the bystander says to the sneezer, "The blessing of God and Holy Mary be on you!" or, "The consecration be upon you!" meaning, the holy water.

The Bohemian declares that should you hear a sneeze, and be unable to see the sneezer, you must say, "God make you well again." Perhaps it was a wandering soul which, by your kind formula, you have now delivered.

The "Rules of Civility" (translated from the French in 1685) declares: "If his lordship chances to sneeze, you are not to bawl out, 'God bless you, sir,' but, pulling off your hat, *bow to him handsomely* and make that observation to yourself."

In Bengal bystanders must make a profound bow in order to avoid ill-luck, and in Portugal it is still the custom for bystanders to remove the hat. Trajan, otherwise indisposed to attend to the ordinary civilities, was very punctilious in giving the proper salutation to sneezers, and expected a like return when he sneezed. It is said of the present German Kaiser that, having sneezed, and those present not knowing what to do, he remarked to those present, "I sneezed and no one said 'Gesundheit!'"

*The Lower Cultures.*—Having indicated the prevalence in the higher cultures of the superstitions attaching to the sneeze, we may turn our attention to similar beliefs among the lower peoples, where human nature is quite as much in the ascendant.

In Indonesia sneezing is taken as an indication that the soul is either leaving or returning to the body. The belief is widely prevalent that a sick man who sneezes will recover, since this happy event betokens the return of the soul. Among Torajas, Javanese, Battak and Dayaks, when a child sneezes its mother pronounces a wish that no spirit may take away the soul of the child. In the case of adults sneezing is a sign that friends think of them, or that enemies are attempting to injure their souls.

When the latter is the supposition, to prevent the success of these malicious designs, an imprecation is uttered by the sneezer.

If an Annamese child less than a year old is so inconsiderate as to sneeze, those present, apprehending danger, call out "*com ca*," "rice and fish," the cry which they raise when he appears to faint or when he starts nervously in his sleep.

The Melanesians, of the Solomon Islands, in Florida, and the New Hebrides, are similarly apprehensive of a child's sneeze. The Mafulu, of New Guinea, are said to have no superstition with regard to sneezing, but the Koita regard is as a sign that the soul has come back to the body. If a person does not sneeze for many weeks this is an indication that the soul is far away. In Miriam, one of the islands of the Torres Straits, when a man sneezes he accepts this as a sign that some one has mentioned his name. He immediately cracks the joints of each thumb by pressing the closed fingers of his respective hands upon the thumbs. In another of these islands, Kauralaig, it was the custom for the sneezer to make violent gestures with his hands and arms, presumably with the intention of driving away the evil influence that was seeking to take up its abode in his irritated nostrils.

Sneezing used to be in North Queensland, Australia, a far more potent thing than it is at the present day. According to a tradition current in the region of Charlotte Bay, one of the earlier heroes once gave a sneeze of such force as to dislodge from the crevice of a tree the arm of another who had not been able to disengage it. The romance of the sneeze has not entirely disappeared from that region, however, for at the present day, the natives declare, the sneeze of a man indicates that a woman is in love with him.

In Motlan when a child sneezes the mother says, "Let him come back into the world!" or, "Let him remain!" On Leper's Island when a child sneezes the people say, "Good wishes!" The soul has been away and has just returned. In Mota, under such circumstances, the saying is, "Live! Roll back to us!" The soul is being drawn out of the body through the nostrils into that other world beyond human ken. When an adult sneezes he says, "Stamp down the mischief from me! Let it be quiet!" or, "Let them say their words in vain! Let them lay their plots in vain!" Thus will the magic of his formula counteract the charm of the enemy.

In Siam those present wish the sneezer long life.

In Saa, one of the Polynesian islands, the sneezer says, "Who is calling me? If for well, good; if for evil, may I be defended!"

In Old Calabar people say, when children sneeze, "Far from you!" accompanying the words with a gesture designed to ward off the impending evil. On the other hand, the Toradjas, of the central Celebes, declare sneezing a sign that a sick person's soul has returned, and that he is recovering. In the Tonga Islands, to sneeze at the moment of setting out on an expedition is a bad omen.

At this time Mr. Mariner, on entering the house, happened to sneeze! Immediately every one present threw down his club, for who would proceed on so important an expedition after so dire an omen! Finow's eyes flashed with the fire of rage; directing them full on Mr. Mariner, he cursed him with the most bitter curse, "Strike your god!"—and, rising from the ground, he demanded why he came there?<sup>2</sup>

If a Maori warrior sneezed when eating it was a sign that he would fall in battle and would be cooked and eaten by the enemy. The sneeze of a common person while eating, or when about to eat, signified that visitors or news would soon arrive; a charm should be said to avert the evil attendant upon a sneeze. To avert evil the Maori pronounced this spell when one sneezed:

Sneeze, living Soul!  
In the light of day.  
Those on the sea are blest with plenty,  
There is plenty for the mighty lord.  
Sneeze thou!  
Baptized into life!

It was not necessary to repeat the whole charm, frequently only the first few words being recited. This charm, or another, was pronounced by the mother, to avert evil consequences, when her child sneezed. In giving a name to a child the "priest" chanted the genealogies of the male line; if the child sneezed, the name that was being uttered at this time was bestowed upon it—possibly because the ancestral spirit was supposed to be inspiring the sneeze. When the king of Sennaar sneezes his courtiers immediately turn their backs and slap their thigh, vigorously.

In the Congo, when the Mushidi, or chief, sneezes, all who hear it clap their hands loudly and shout, "Long live the King! Hail!" The oftener he sneezes the longer will be his life, a sneeze being but an outflow, or the overflow of a superabundance of life. Consequently, a paroxysm of sneezing evokes a chorus of approval. When a Bakongo sneezes some one sitting close by says, "Come quickly." If the sneezer be a child of tender years the mother calls out, "Come back quickly." This is to summon back the spirit which is supposed to be leaving the body when one sneezes. If any of the slaves buried alive at the

<sup>2</sup> J. Martin, "The Tonga Islands," p. 271.

death of a Yao chief should sneeze after being placed in the grave, he was spared, in the belief that the spirit had thus signified his refusal of that particular victim. Evidently, they were not in the habit of taking snuff—this would have been a life-saver.

A Gold Coast story speaks of a leaf, which, when a person smelled it, caused sneezing. "They rubbed the leaf upon the noses of the two cows. Then the cows at once looked as if they wanted to sneeze, and they rubbed the leaf on the noses of the two cows." A medicine-man attempted to restore a woman killed by witchcraft by inducing sneezing, presumably so that the evil spirit would escape—or her own return. When the king of Dahomey sneezed, all present touched the ground with their foreheads; but to sneeze in the presence of royalty was punished by a fine. Among the Ewe-speaking peoples to sneeze is a bad omen. Among the western tribes

this involuntary convulsion is an indication that something is happening to the indwelling spirit, usually that it is about to quit the body; and as that affords opportunity for a homeless indwelling spirit to enter the body and cause sickness, the omen is bad. Among the eastern tribes, though the notion of the indwelling spirit has been to some extent confused with that of the ghost-man, the old superstition still prevails.

If the indwelling spirit should leave a man when he is awake, he becomes apprised of its departure by a sneeze or a yawn. Hence the sneeze is believed to indicate that the *kra*, one of the man's souls, is leaving the body, and the bystanders always offer some wishes of good health.

Among the Tshi-speaking tribes a sneeze seems to be regarded as an evidence of something unpleasant or painful having happened to the indwelling *kra*. Hence, as the well-being of the man is indissolubly bound up with that of his *kra*, it is usual for persons to address wishes of long life and good health to anyone who sneezed, with the idea of thereby averting an independent ill.

When the king of Ashantee sneezes, every person present touches or lays the two first fingers across the forehead and breast, as the Moors did when they pronounced a blessing, and the Ashantees, invariably, to propitiate one. When the king of Monomotapa sneezed, it became a national concern. Those nearest the royal person howled a salutation, which was taken up by the antechamber; and when the horrid cry had run through the palace, it was re-echoed by the whole city.

When a Thonga sneezes, he is addressed with this good wish: "Life and sleep!" He himself calls upon the gods, saying:

I pray to you! I have no anger against you! Be with me and let

me sneeze! Let me sleep and let me see life! so that I may go by the road, I may find an antelope (dead in the bush), I may take it on my shoulders; or that I may go and kill an elephant (meaning, meet with a girl and obtain her favor). Now I say it is enough, you nose!

The sneeze of a child during one of the ceremonies is ominous.

Any man who sneezed in the presence of the Zulu chief, Chaka, was instantly killed. The Xosa says, "Qamata help me!" Qamata being either a powerful chief or some supernatural being. Other Kafirs, when they sneeze, say, "Chiefs," or, "May the chiefs bless me!"—much as people in the lower classes in England say, "Lor' bless you!" To sneeze is thought to be a very good sign. In ancient days, when a Zulu chief sneezed, all the people near would say, "May the chief live long!" or, "May he grow greater!" If a sick person begins to sneeze, the people say it is a sure sign that he is about to recover, for the spirits are pleased." If he is ill and does not sneeze the disease is a malignant one. To a child who sneezes they say, "Grow!" for this is a sign of health. In the case of an adult it is a sign that the ancestral spirits have come to the agent and he returns thanks. This is especially true of the medicine-men. The Christian Zulus say, "Preserve, look upon me!" or, "Heaven and Earth!" Elsewhere, among the Kafirs,

Sneezing is considered a very good sign, and when a small child sneezes the mother says, "Thanks, Chiefs!" thus giving thanks to the ancestral spirits who are supposed to be shown by this sign to be taking care of the child. Sometimes when a child sneezes the mother will simply say, "Chiefs!" thus giving thanks to the *amatongo* (ancestral spirits). At other times the mother says, "Throw out and you will grow well."

The North American Indians, to mention but one more culture area, have attached considerable importance to the sneeze. Among the Eskimo of Hudson Bay, when a person sneezes, he must say to his soul, "Come back!" otherwise he might become sick. If a child sneezes, the mother smacks her lips, the appropriate response of the child which she performs for it. The sneeze of a sick person, however, is a sign of approaching recovery. The Bilqula declare sneezing an indication that people are talking about one. To sneeze three times in succession was believed by the Stlatlumh to bring good luck to the person sneezing. To sneeze through the right nostril is a sign of good fortune; to sneeze through the left, a sign of bad fortune.

The Wasco associate sneezing with mention of a person's name:

The young men asked, "Who is the chief of the village?" The old woman said, "We must not tell you. If we mention his name, that moment

he will sneeze and say, 'My name is mentioned in the old house at the end of the village,' and he will send to see who is here," but the brothers insisted. At last the old woman told him, and that instant the chief sneezed and sent to the house.

The same belief is found among the Takelma, where a person who sneezes says, "Who calls my name?"

"Thou shalt prosper," shall he say of me, "yet another day shalt thou go ahead." (That is, "mayest thou continue to live.") Ye shall blow to me, meaning, "blow a whiff of tobacco smoke for my prosperity." Here, too,

When a person sneezed, it was believed that his name was being mentioned by some one afar off. To prevent the evil effect to the person named of a possible mention of his name in connection with ill wishes (for words as such may have power of good or ill), it was customary to apostrophize the absent ones: "Who is it that calls my name? May ye (who speak to me) say in regard to me: 'Do thou prosper, mayest thou go ahead [*i. e.*, continue life] yet another day!' May ye blow to me!"

Among the Yana a woman says:

May I be happy! Do you people not speak about me! Do you speak for my happiness when speaking about me!

A man says:

May I be happy! May my legs feel light! May you people speak for my happiness! Would that you would let me alone! I bathe, and I go back into my house, and I rejoice in my eating.

Among the Dakota to sneeze once means that a man's special friend, his son, or his wife, has pronounced his name; whereupon he calls out, "My son." If he sneezes twice he exclaims, "My son and his mother." When a Crow Indian sneezes bystanders say to him, "They are calling you; that is why you sneeze," though the remark is said to be regarded simply as a joke. The Apache remarks, "Some one calls my name." The Pima pronounces the names of Earth Magician and of Elder Brother, two of the culture heroes, when he sneezes; or, he may simply exclaim, "Pity me!" as a plea to one of these two creatures. The Guiana Indians believe that during sneezing or yawning the soul is temporarily leaving the body, though what they do about it we are not told.

When De Sota, in the year 1542, was interviewing the Cacique Guachoya, the latter happened to sneeze. Thereupon all the attendants of the cacique bowed their heads, opened and closed their arms, and made signs of veneration, saluting their prince with such phrases as, "May the sun guard you!" "May the sun shine upon you!" "May the sun defend you!" "May the sun protect you!"

*The Ominous Sneeze.*—As we have seen, the sneeze is frequently accepted as indicative of good or of ill luck, and sometimes there is a further specification of the fortune, good or bad, to be expected.

In the island of Florida the sneeze indicates that some one is speaking about the man, is angry with him, is calling upon his *tindalo*, or personal ghost, to eat him. He accordingly responds by calling upon his own *tindalo* to take revenge on the man who would injure him. In the Celebes a man who sneezes when about to part company with friends must return, and sit down awhile in order to fend off the impending ill.

The Siamese consider it lucky to sneeze many times. They believe also that the judges of the lower realm of shades keep a book in which the name of every one is registered, and that, when this book is opened all those whose names appear on the page that is observed sneeze. Their optimism, therefore, seems to indicate great faith in a clear record on this golden book. To the Chinaman, too, the sneeze indicates luck, and the gambler who sneezes knows that he will win. In many parts of Europe to sneeze when one sees a hearse indicates that another death will soon occur in that vicinity. In India to sneeze at the threshold is unlucky. The Romans declared that when a cupid-like little boy sneezed the birth of a beautiful girl baby was thereby indicated.

The Greeks considered sneezing to the left unlucky, but lucky if to the right. When Themistocles sacrificed in his galley before the battle of Xeres, and one of the assistants upon the right hand sneezed, Euphantides, the soothsayer, presaged the victory of the Greeks and the overthrow of the Persians. When Xenophon was addressing his troops, the doughty ten thousand, and his remarks, "We have many reasons to hope for preservation," were punctuated by a sneeze from one of the attending soldiers, Xenophon paused, then resumed: "Since, my fellow-soldiers, at the mention of your preservation, Jupiter has sent this omen." Xenophon had previously profited by this omen, for he owed his appointment as general to the happy event of a sneeze to the right of him while he was making a speech. On each occasion the army accepted the omen and the men were inspired with new vigor. The custom of regarding the sneeze as ominous is as old as Homer. Evidence of this is to be found in the eighteenth book of the *Odyssey*:

She spoke: Telemachus there sneezed aloud;  
Constrain'd, his nostril echo's through the crowd.  
The smiling queen the happy omen blest:  
So may the impious fall, by fate opprest.

Aristotle puzzled over the problem—And is it not enough to try the mettle of any philosopher?—“Why sneezing from noon to midnight was good, but from night to noon unlucky.” St. Austin declares: “The ancients were wont to go to bed again if they sneezed while they put on their shoe.”

In England, as still in Siam, much sneezing is regarded as favorable. “Two or three neses be holsom; one is a shrewd token,” says an old English motto. “He hath sneezed thrice, turn him out of the hospital,” was a seventeenth-century proverb, an assurance that the patient will now do well. Sir Thomas Browne recognized it as in the main a good sign and approved of the giving to persons near death a medicine which would induce sneezing—“if the faculty arise, and sternutation ensues, they conceive hopes of life, and with gratulation receive the sign of safety.” If a sick person can not sneeze the disease will end in death—a belief which we have found in other parts of the world. Sir Thomas Browne assures us, however, that sneezing is bad if the patient be an unmarried girl, a widow, a barren wife, a shoe-maker’s wife, a woman sick with the cholera.

The meaning attached to sneezing by European peoples is of various kinds. An unsuccessful attempt to sneeze indicates that you will lose something of value; but if you sneeze violently enough to tear a buttonhole out of a shirt, dress, or vest, riches are rapidly coming your way. It is good to sneeze while reading, when launching an argument, when about to retire, when eating—though, as to the latter, negroes declare it betokens news of a death. It is good to sneeze at seed sowing, for the harvest will be great. You will not sleep well if the servant sneezed while making up your bed—possibly because you will be amid too much dust. Two men talking business and sneezing simultaneously have cause for mutual and self-congratulation. The soldier who sneezes at the mention of an approaching battle will be on the side favored by victory. (Then may such a sneeze go forth from all the Sammies and Tommies as will blow the enemy —! But, doubtless, they are sneezing enough.) To sneeze twice each night for three successive nights is a sign of approaching death. If you sneeze between eleven and twelve o’clock, you may expect a stranger. Husband, beware: If you sneeze while you are getting up in the morning, lie down again for another three hours, else your wife will be master for a week. Whether any worse fate awaits the husband who adopts the above-mentioned prophylactic, who can say?

To sneeze before breakfast is well; you will receive a present that day, unless it be Sunday; in which case declare Vermonters, you will hear of the death of a friend before another Saturday night. Instead of waiting until the preprandial hours of a Sunday morning, sneeze rather on Saturday night after the lights are out, and, on the following day you will be rewarded by the sight of a person whom you have never seen before—a promise perhaps more inspiring to the countryman than to the dweller in the city. If you sneeze with food in your mouth you will hear of the death of a friend; every time you sneeze at table there will be one more or less the following meal. Whether it be more or less may depend, we surmise, on whether the old Roman advice was followed—*Sternutare volens vicino obvertito vultum*—when you sneeze turn aside your countenance from your neighbor—; or whether, on the other hand, the advice was followed which is given in a book called “The Schools of Slovenrie, or Cato turn’d wrong side outward, translated out of Latin into English Verse, to the use of all English Christendome except Court and Cittie; by R. F. Gent., London, 1605,” wherein we read:

When you would sneeze, strit turn yourselfe into your neighbor’s face:  
As for my part, wherein to sneeze, I know no fitter place;  
It is an order, when you sneeze *good men will pray for you*;  
Mark him that doth so, for I think he is your friend most true.  
And that your friend may know who sneezes, and may for you pray,  
Be sure you not forget to sneeze full in his face alway.  
But when thou hear’st another sneeze, although he be thy father,  
Say not *God blest him*, but *Choke him*, or some such matter, rather.

• • • • • • •

Aristotle’s explanation of the respect shown to sneezing is that the first men, viewing the head as the principal seat of the soul, an intelligent organ governing as well as animating the entire body, carried this respect to sternutation as the most manifest sign of life. Hence the compliments heaped upon the sneezer. Since it is a motion of the brain suddenly expelling through the nostrils what is offensive to it, it can not fail to afford some evidence of the brain’s, that is, the mind’s vigor. Aristotle’s view is endorsed by Sir Thomas Browne.

That some peoples should attach a sinister meaning and others a favorable meaning to the sneeze is not difficult to understand. Fear of bad consequences leads to the pronouncement of a formula, a blessing designed to ward off the evil. The pronouncement of a blessing or of wishes for one’s welfare may easily pass over into expectation of its fulfilment, and, conse-

quently, of benefits. Eventually the benefits are thought of to the exclusion of the threatening evils, and hence the sneeze becomes propitious. It is easy to see that a people may entertain one or the other attitude toward it; and that, possibly as the result of accidental association, particularly should it receive confirmation, some sorts of sneezes may be considered propitious and others dangerous.

Thus the explantion of the curious beliefs associated with the extraordinary phenomenon of sneezing is not far to seek, and has already been repeatedly given in the various practices already described. The soul often finds exit or entrance by the nose or by the mouth, for it is in large part identified with the breath. The breath of the nostrils is indeed the life of a man, and his life force is intimately bound up with his soul. For this reason the nostrils as well as the mouth of the dying man are sometimes held or closed to keep in the soul. This is done sometimes for the benefit of the deceased, since this soul should accompany the body wherein it has resided, and sometimes for the benefit of the survivors who have little desire to remain in the company of the disembodied spirit of him with whom they associated in life. In the Celebes fish hooks were attached to a man's nostrils to impale the soul of the dying should it attempt to escape. Eskimo mourners, or those who prepare the body for burial, plug the nostrils lest the soul which is supposed to remain with the body should find exit and follow the migratory soul of the dead to the land whence souls are reincarnated. It is not uncommon for savages, while sleeping, to cover the nostrils and the mouth, to prevent the escape of the soul unknown to the unconscious owner. Even the cultured Greeks and Romans were not averse to leaning over the dying man in order to obtain the spirit of the departed by inhaling his last breath, and so receiving his spirit into themselves.

This, coupled with appreciation of its startling and peculiar nature, is the philosophy which has given rise both to the romance and to the tragedy of the sneeze.